



Eliminating violence against children

guidance for strategic vision and action

The United Nations Secretary-General's Report on Violence against Children (2006) represents the first comprehensive, global analysis of the different forms of violence against children. The Study addresses various settings where violence against children takes place and puts forward a set of recommendations for individual countries and the international community at large.

*One of the study's overarching recommendations calls upon states to develop an **integrated national strategy on violence against children** and to identify a focal point to oversee the implementation of measures to prevent and respond to violence.*

The Council of Europe supported the process of the Study throughout. In order to address legal, health, educational and social dimensions of violence against children, in 2006 the Council of Europe launched its programme "Building a Europe for and with children". The programme's main objective has been to help states' decision makers and stakeholders set up and implement comprehensive national strategies and policies to promote the rights of the child and eradicate all forms of violence against children.

The Council of Europe has established excellent working relations with the Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children who acts as a high-profile global advocate to promote the prevention and elimination of all violence against children and to encourage international and regional co-operation.





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What is violence against children?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines violence as including all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect and negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. The key message of the United Nations Secretary-General's Study is that no form of violence against children is justifiable and that all forms of violence are preventable.

What are the effects of violence on children?

The consequences of violence against children vary according to its nature and severity. Acute and long-term consequences may include:

- bruises, welts, burns, scalds and fractures;
- reproductive health problems;
- criminal, violent and other risk-taking behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse;
- poor self-esteem, depression and anxiety;
- developmental delays.

Generally, the exposure of children to violence results in their greater susceptibility to a wide range of lifelong social, emotional and cognitive impairments. The research suggests that the economic costs of violence against children (direct, indirect and those borne by the criminal justice system and other services and institutions) to society are significant.

Protection from violence

As a human rights organisation, the Council of Europe pursues a child rights approach to violence against children. That means that all forms of violence represent a violation of children's rights and that all children have the right to protection from all forms of violence while in the care of their parents, legal guardians or any other person.

All Council of Europe member states have ratified the UNCRC. By doing so they have recognised that they, as states, have the paramount responsibility to uphold children's rights and to protect all children within their jurisdiction from all forms of violence at all times and in all settings.

From isolated actions to integrated strategies

The exposure of children to one form of violence increases their vulnerability to other forms of violent behaviours. Therefore, effective prevention of and reaction to violence, as well as effective safeguarding of the rights of the child call for a strategic and multidisciplinary approach.

The Council of Europe's **policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence** aim to be a source of inspiration for states striving to adopt a holistic approach to violence against children and to guarantee their children a childhood free from violence.



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An integrated national strategy – key building blocks

The Council of Europe guidelines contain detailed proposals on how to develop an integrated national strategy on the rights of the child and the eradication of violence against children. The strategy is defined as a multidisciplinary and systematic framework integrated into the national planning process, rooted in the UNCRC and bringing together all stakeholders. A model national strategy should integrate the following key components:

1 *The legal framework*

- the national legal framework should prioritise the prevention of violence and safeguard the rights of the child (e.g. by registering children immediately after birth, setting a minimum age for sexual consent);
- national legislation should prohibit all violence against children, including all corporal punishment, at all times and in all settings, including within the family/home;
- there should be no impunity for those who commit violent offences against children;
- the state should be encouraged to accede to global and regional instruments on the rights of the child and the protection of children from violence.

2 *The policy framework*

- the existence of a national child rights policy is crucial for the realisation of the child's right to be protected from all forms of violence. Such a policy should ensure that the provisions and principles of the UNCRC permeate all aspects of government policy and all public actions affecting children;
- the overall goal of child and family policies should be
 - to support families in their child-rearing responsibilities;
 - to prevent, as far as possible, the separation of children from their families;
 - to provide for family-like and community-based alternatives to avoid placement of children in institutions;
 - in cases of separation, when appropriate, to ensure ongoing contact between children and their parents and to support family reunification when it is in the best interest of the child;
- children should be actively empowered, according to their evolving capacities and with their formal consent, to participate meaningfully in the planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes to promote their rights and prevent violence against children.



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3 *The institutional framework*

- The sustainable institutional framework required for the strategy's realisation should comprise:
 - an agency with the primary responsibility of protecting children from violence and co-ordinating and monitoring the strategy's implementation;
 - a network of public institutions contributing to child protection and co-operating with the co-ordinating agency and all other stakeholders;
 - an independent human rights institution to promote and protect the rights of the child;
 - an observatory on the rights of the child, a national statistical office or a research institute to co-ordinate the collection, analysis, management and dissemination of data;
 - civil society, including human rights institutions and professional networks;
 - children and their organisations.

4 *Building a culture of respect for the rights of the child*

- it is the state's obligation to make information on the rights of the child widely known to children and adults alike. To ensure wider respect for the right for all children to be protected from violence, states should promote a clear and unequivocal intolerance of all forms of violence against children within society;
- to eradicate violent punishment, parents' and carers' knowledge of the rights of the child and of positive non-violent parenting practices should be strengthened by means such as their enrolment in positive parenting programmes;
- the training of professionals working in contact with children should be seen as an important long-term investment in children's development and well-being. The state and society should value these professions and attribute to them the requisite moral, financial and other forms of public and private support;
- free and independent media, with due respect for their self-regulation, should play a powerful role in building a culture of respect for the rights of the child. The media should be encouraged to educate both children and adults in the rights of the child, promote child participation, foster positive parenting practices, strengthen intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, and foster non-violent values in society.



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5 *Child-friendly services and mechanisms*

- the main objective of institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care, education and protection of children should be to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, children's survival, development and well-being. All children should have access to quality services adapted to their needs;
- standards should be set for all such institutions aimed at promoting the best interests and full development of the child. Compliance with those standards should be subject to regular independent monitoring;
- reporting of violence should become mandatory for all professionals in contact with children. Each service, institution or facility responsible for the care, education and protection of children should have a well-publicised and easily accessible service, respectful of the child's privacy, and be required to investigate allegations of violence against children promptly and fully;
- employment of persons convicted of violent/sexual offences against children in positions involving significant contact with children should be prohibited;
- an independent, confidential, well-advertised, easy to memorise and toll-free telephone help line should be available for children to seek confidential and professional advice and counselling and to report violence;
- the state should take all the necessary steps to promote physical and psychological recovery and rehabilitation of child victims and witnesses of violence and, if need be, of their families;
- services for the prevention of violence, the protection of children and the treatment of victims should be made available particularly at local level. Procedures for the referral of child victims of violence and for inter-agency co-operation should be clearly defined.

6 *Research and data collection*

Identification of an effective strategy for the protection of children from violence depends on the availability and proper analysis of data at national, regional and local levels. The adoption of a national research agenda represents the most appropriate way of promoting an integrated and systematic approach to data collection, analysis, dissemination and research.

7 *International co-operation*

Both member states of the Council of Europe and other states should be encouraged to co-operate with each other for the purpose of:

- preventing and combating all forms of violence against children;
- protecting and assisting child victims and witnesses of violence;
- investigating or prosecuting criminal offences involving violence against children.



BUILDING A EUROPE FOR AND WITH CHILDREN



The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is an international organisation founded in 1949 which now has 47 member states. Its role is to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It establishes common democratic principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other conventions and recommendations on the protection of persons, which of course includes Europe's 150 million children.

“Building a Europe for and with children”
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